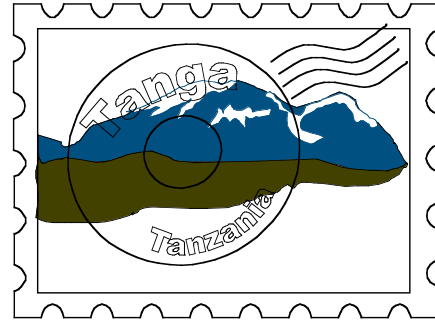


JAMBO FRIENDS!

My name is Akili, and I just said 'Hello' in Swahili, the native language of Tanzania. You must excuse me because I am quite tired from my most recent trip. I just came back from climbing the great Mount Kilimanjaro! But I cannot wait to tell you all about Tanzania, my homeland and birthplace.



Mount Kilimanjaro lies on the border of Tanzania and Kenya, just south of the Equator. To the west lies the Great African Rift Valley.

My family lives in the town of Tanga, which is on the coast of the Indian Ocean. We're located in northern Tanzania, and, with a population of over 200,000, our city is one of the largest in the country. We are in southern Africa, bordered by countries such as Rwanda, Congo, Mozambique, Kenya, Zambia and Malawi. The border with Kenya is about 80 km away from Tanga, which is nice because my grandparents live there.

But let's get back to my most recent adventures at Mount Kilimanjaro. I've been to the national park to take pictures, but this is the first time I've felt confident enough to actually climb. Reaching the summit was one of the greatest feelings

I've ever had! The mountain is a volcano that is almost 6,100 m (20,000 ft) tall! It's the highest point in Africa and one of the tallest in the world. Mount Kilimanjaro seems to rise out of the grasslands. The base is 80 km on one side and 40 km on the other.

So, you probably think I'm some kind of expert mountain climber who has climbed many tall and dangerous mountains before, right? Wrong! This is the first time I've ever gone mountain climbing aside from climbing some hills around my neighborhood.



Kilimanjaro! Notice the gradual slope; it is easy to climb.
http://volcano.und.nodak.edu/vwdocs/volc_images/img_kilimanjaro.html

You see, Mount Kilimanjaro is known as one of the easiest tall mountains to climb. If you take one of the safe routes, any person of normal health can reach the top even without any mountain climbing experience. The only thing you have to be careful about is altitude sickness. But I know of tons of beginners who climb it all the time. In fact, 15,000 people try to reach the top of Mount Kilimanjaro every year, and nearly half of them are successful.

You should know the background of Mount Kilimanjaro. The mountain is part of the great African Rift Valley, a north-south stretch of land in Africa where the land is splitting apart and cracking! A rift is any kind of crack in the land. The land on either side of the crack is moving apart. In fact, many scientists think the continent will one day split apart and that the Indian Ocean will flood the valley, creating another ocean where the Rift Valley once was! But don't worry – if that does ever happen, it won't be for a few million years.

Mount Kilimanjaro is one of 20 volcanoes in the southern end of the African Rift Valley. Some of the other more famous mountains are Mount Kenya, Mount Karisimbi, Mount Elgon, and the Crater Highlands. This entire area is buzzing with seismic activity. Earthquakes happen here quite a lot, and volcanic eruptions are always feared (although not many people think Mount Kilimanjaro will erupt any time soon). My mother, who is a geology professor at the national university, says that there are those who are scared the volcano might collapse and trigger a violent eruption similar to the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens in the United States. I hope this is not the case, but landslides and minor collapses have been reported on one of Kilimanjaro's peaks. There hasn't been any official recorded history of volcanic activity, so what Mount Kilimanjaro is going to do is anyone's guess!



These are two lakes formed from rifting millions of years ago. The rifts were filled with seawater. However, today there is no connection to the sea.

<http://home.earthlink.net/~kaydeejay/african.html>

The African Rift Valley is also home to lots of lakes. Because of the geologic activity underneath them, the waters on the surface are warm and salty. One of the lakes I like to visit is Lake Bogoria, which is located in eastern Africa. My older brother Emeka often comes with me on these trips. He works at the national university with my mother, and he knows a lot more about the rift valley. He says that this lake is famous because it is home to countless flocks of pink flamingoes! Have you seen a flamingo up close before?

I started my climb today in the mists of the equatorial jungle. As I climbed, the temperature dropped, there was less water in the air, and the plants changed. When I reached the top there was snow. That is the only place we find snow and ice around here. It felt like a little bit of the Arctic standing high above the tropics.

I can't wait to get my pictures developed from my trip up to the top of Kibo, which is the name of Mount Kilimanjaro's highest peak. From Kibo there are great views of the grasslands of Tanzania. Once you reach Kibo, there's an icy mile-wide crater surrounded by steam. The whole place smells like rotten eggs from the sulfur! You definitely need to see the pictures!

So, if you ever decide to visit, be sure to brush up on some Swahili phrases and get ready to see one of the tallest mountains in the world – and perhaps the site of the world's next ocean!

Sincerely,
Akili Ngwonko
3°S 37°E